

ECHOES OF THE PAST LIVE ON IN STREET

ANJOSAI
AUG
20TH
2009

KEN White's recently restored Golden Lion Bridge mural is a focal point in Swindon town centre, just as the bridge itself once was.

The elaborate iron lift bridge was built in the GWR works in 1870, replacing the original wooden swing bridge over the Wilts and Berks Canal.

Its neighbouring pedestrian footbridge, paid for by public subscription, was added in 1877.

Once a farm track leading from Upper Eastcott, the main road through New Swindon soon became known as Bridge Street, while the bridge itself took its name from the Golden Lion Inn.

The canal-side pub and a few cottages were built in the late 1840s where, at the time of the 1851 census, Thomas Edwards was the landlord.

The area was still very much under construction and the census enumerators described the properties as "Cottage next Golden Lion beside the Canal" and "Baker's shop next Golden Lion."

It was a somewhat hazardous setting for a pub and it was not unknown for the patrons to fall in the canal.

At least one Victorian landlord was said to employ a man with a pole to pull out anyone taking an impromptu dip.

An absence of street lighting also became a cause for concern as development continued in the area and in 1864 the Free Christian Church subscribed for a gas lamp to be situated near the bridge.

"From the Golden Lion bridge to the Centre were a few private houses, standing back from the street, with long gardens in front, the end, or Tram Centre portion, being a piece of waste ground," wrote Frederick Large in *A Swindon Retrospect 1855-1930*.

As well as a busy shopping thoroughfare, Bridge Street was also the site of the Tram Centre at the Fleet Street junction, as mentioned by Frederick Large.

Original plans were for an eight-mile electric tramway from the Corn Exchange in Old Swindon to the GWR station in the new town.

The eventual route measured three miles and five furlongs and



PICTURESQUE The Golden Lion Bridge and, inset, the golden lion statue in Canal Walk



opened on September 22, 1904.

The Golden Lion statue in Canal Walk commemorates the approximate site of the Victorian pub.

It was brought down to the forecourt of the pub as the original one stood on a parapet on the roof.

During the 1960s development of the town centre the lion was removed to a council yard and stored beneath tarpaulins for safekeeping.

Ironically, the statue that had weathered the elements for so many years became damp and cracked into pieces.

Sculptor Carleton Attwood was

commissioned to create a replacement, unveiled during the Queen's Jubilee Year in 1977.

With the Wilts and Berks Canal officially closed in 1914, the Golden Lion Bridge itself became redundant and was demolished in 1918.

Fortunately Ken White's depiction has survived to preserve a little bit of Swindon's history

Ken keeps his artwork looking vibrant



In 1901 James Williams was hotel keeper at the Golden Lion Hotel.

Other pubs in Bridge Street included the Volunteer Hotel with landlord Charles Earley in charge; Thomas Gardiner was at the Lamb Inn, while Lucy Peck was landlady at

the Rolling Mills Inn.

Local artist Ken White, above, first painted the mural on the side of a terraced house in Fleming Way in 1976 as part of a job creation scheme for Thamesdown Arts.

Based on an early 20th century

photograph, Ken added his own touch with representations of hammerman poet Alfred Williams and bridge builder Brunel.

It was previously repainted in 1983 and the latest restoration job took just over two weeks.

